



Jill C. Duson
Senator, District 27
Assistant Majority Leader

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Jill C. Duson presenting
**LD 2147, An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of
Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Jill Duson and I serve as the Senate Assistant Majority Leader, representing Senate District 27, which is part of Portland and part of Westbrook. I am pleased to stand before you today to present my bill, LD 2147, An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties.

In late September of 2025, the University of Maine System received notice that grant funding for its Upward Bound programs would be discontinued. I was deeply disappointed to learn this news, particularly for the low-income and first-generation students who would lose access to critical academic tutoring, counseling, and college preparatory services. For many of these students, this loss also meant the disappearance of trusted mentors, peers, and role models who have supported and encouraged their educational journeys.

I am a product of the Upward Bound program hosted at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. That Upward Bound opened doors for me and made my educational and professional path possible.

I grew up in the public school system of Chester, Pennsylvania. Our city schools were segregated. I was an armchair witness to the community demonstrations to demand desegregation, which began in November 1963, just as I entered the 5th grade at Franklin Elementary School. It was not until 8th-grade that I first connected with Swarthmore College Upward Bound. I was officially accepted to Upward Bound in 1966, as a rising 9th grader, and began attending tutoring sessions staffed by young students and faculty sponsors from the College.

Through that support, I became a first-generation college student, graduating from Antioch College in 1976 and going on to earn my Juris Doctor degree from University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1979.



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I share my story as a testament to the opportunities that Upward Bound made possible for me. There are many young people across the state of Maine who stand at similar crossroads, possessing the intellect, passion, drive, and potential to succeed, but lacking the additional support and structure to get them there.

This bill, LD 2147, restores critical one-time funding to the University of Maine System to deliver academic, college, and career services to eligible students in six high schools across Androscoggin and Oxford counties. In doing so, this legislation reaffirms Maine's commitment to equity and opportunity. It recognizes that investing in our students is also an investment in their families, as well as the long-term vitality of the state's public institutions and workforce.

Programs like Upward Bound are not merely supplemental; they are often the only sustained bridge between high school and future opportunities. By preserving these pathways, Maine strengthens its higher education system, expands pathways to economic mobility, supports local communities, and ensures that the promise of public education remains accessible to students in every region of the state.

Today, you will hear from educators and community leaders who will share the impact of Upward Bound programs and what the passage of this bill would mean for the lives and futures of students across our state.

I am grateful for your attention to this important matter and for the opportunity to present LD 2147. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.